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Travel Diary: June 5, 1914

Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson

Cerro de Pasco Smelter, Peru,

Friday, June 5, 1914.

From the window of our car we can see four Gringoes, two men and two women, one of them nicely dressed in white and whose little fox terrier looks on, cheerily playing away at tennis. It is nine o'clock, and the thermometer, which has been about 26° during the night, has with the help of the sunshine crawled above the freezing mark. The atmosphere for miles is misty with fumes from the smelter, the coke ovens, etc. There is a row of gray limestone houses with corrugated iron roofs and not a blade of vegetation of any description to cheer the eye of these exiles. For hundreds of yards along the railway tracks is that hideous confusion of rusting debris of machinery, the fragments and heaps of slag and cinders and of infernal looking waste which characterizes modern industry, and as we back down the track we see in the distance the yellow pampa of Junin, shading to the violet drab range showing two or three snow caps against a blue sky, pale through the evil smelling fumes.

We arrived here last night and were met by Mr. O. E. Jager, an Australian, who is Superintendent of the smelter under Mr. W. J. Hamilton, a Canadian, the General Manager. We stopped opposite the smelter and first spent half an hour going through it with Mr. Jager. The labor is Indian, even to the men who run the overhead trolleys carrying huge buckets of molten mat in the stages of process from crude ore to the copper bars of commerce. There were some Gringo foremen, but the Indians were skimming the slag from the molten mat and doing all the work. The smelter has a pay roll of £11,000 per month and employs 1000 men. The men receive from Sols 1.50 a day for manual labor to Sols 4 to 10 a day for mechanics, boilermakers, etc., with a bonus of 10% if they work 28 days a month. Last month the smelter turned out 2100 tons of pig copper running 100 ounces of silver and 1 1/2 ounces of gold to the ton approximately. In their new electric plant here Indians do all the work under foreign foremen. Peruvians are employed in the timekeeper's office and even in the machine shops and all other branches native labor, almost entirely Indian, has been trained and is being substituted for

foreing labor, still, however, under the supervision of foreign foremen. Mr. Jager says the Indians lie and steal at every opportunity, and that while they can deal with a problem which they have seen dealt with before, being densely ignorant and unable to apply theory if anything unusual occurs they are quite helpless. The Company has a night school for the Indians. The men, it seems, do not care to go there to learn reading and writing, but the children attend more or less. There is also a Government school in a building supplied by the Company, which also furnishes good cement rooms for its labor at the rent of Sol 1 per month, surely very reasonable. The Indians seem to prefer filthy surroundings, and the Company had to order that pigs should no longer be kept in the same rooms with families on pain of death to the pigs. There is a staff of American doctors under a Peruvian figurehead, and an emergency hospital here subsidiary to a very good hospital at the mines. There is also a place for isolating contagious diseases, smallpox and typhus occasionally making their appearance. The Indians all chew coca and regard getting drunk as the chief joy of life. Those who are well paid buy tawdry bright colored things for their wives and their houses, but they seldom show any sign of thrift or comfort. They fight a little among themselves, but do not carry weapons and in general are docile. Most of them come from the Huancayo country. They will steal even pieces of machinery utterly useless to themselves and unsaleable, and the Company has had to raid their houses to get back stolen objects. Even well paid men will steal little by little cotton waste patiently to accumulate enough for a mattress, and those who build their own shacks will endeavor to steal rather than purchase the corrugated iron and other materials which, added to blocks of a sort of peat, complete the construction. In the smelter they are worked in three eight-hour shifts. These men are drafted for the army, several good ones having been lately taken. I imagine the recruiting is confined to the Indians tame enough to know Spanish instead of exclusively Quichua.

Huancayo, Sunday, June 7, 1914

(In private car)

The Indians in Peru are not nearly so good looking as those in Ecuador, among whom there is much beauty of well-chiseled noses, mouths and chins, fine eyes and well proportioned faces. Here such types seem quite rare. The lips protrude more, and a broad, flat face and small eyes prevail. The dress and manner is more sophisticated. Coming up the railway we hardly saw a poncho until we reached Casapalca and shabby trousers and coats were the rule. With the ponchos began to appear occasional bright-colored skirts on the women. At the smelter and especially at Cerro de Pasco ponchos became more common, and many of the men wore a sort of zouave-like black breeches with woolen stockings or with cloth wound about their legs like puttees, the whole population, at Cerro de Pasco especially, being very ragged and grimy. There Lucy noticed about eight distinct types of degenerates. After the eight o'clock whistle, when the shifts changed, two stalwart Indians in overalls passed from the smelter, each with a quart bottle protruding from his hip pocket. Mr. Jager came and showed us some photographs of Tarma and the Chanchamayo Valley, and then took us for a stroll to the Company's stores and to the market place, where Indian women sat silently spinning among their wares. The Company has a wall around its property, but permits outside shopkeepers within. Beyond the wall are a few Peruvian houses, and over there a man publishes an occasional newspaper attacking the Company in various ways. This, it seems, is quite common, although the Peruvian Corporation is the chief target of jealous attack. A few years ago when the Company's coal mines 25 miles away are shut down by a fearful accident and the smelter had to cease work, the whole community was embarrassed by financial paralysis, and even in Lima the Government was petitioned to send soldiers to open the mines. On that occasion 63 Indians were killed by the explosion and the moaning of their wives and children in the night was gruesome and heartrending.

It seems that when Billinghurst stirred up a strike in the

Callao shops of the Central Railway and the shops were shut down until an adjustment was reached, President Billinghurst telephoned Mr. Morkill wanting to see him and Morkill replied that he was very busy getting off his English mail. Billinghurst motored to Morkill's office and came in and said that now the strike was over and the men were ready to return to work the shops must be opened. Morkill replied that he was sorry that he was too busy to discuss the matter and was not ready to reopen the shops,- that in fact he was thinking of abandoning them and establishing others up the line. In this way Billinghurst was shown that he could not manage the affairs of the Company.

Speaking of Billinghurst, Lucy heard two delicious things told her by a foreigner here so long as scarcely to see their funny side. They were these:, during the last general election Red Cross stations were set up at the street corners in Lima, and second, a bull fight was arranged to raise funds for the Peruvian Scoiety for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

About eleven o'clock Friday we pulled out for Cerro de Pasco, about forty miles run up from the smelter, to its perch at 14,000 feet. The two nights at Cerro de Pasco and at the smelter I felt a sort of lameness in the chest and headache beginning in the back of the head and growing by morning to a throbbing pain like that that goes with a severe bilious attack. I slept very badly and every slight exertion made heart and breathing very rapid. At Cerro de Pasco we were met by Mr. P. S. Couldrey, a Canadian, General Superintendent of the mines, and Mr. Enrique Stone, an ancient Britisher who has spent forty-three years here. After a chat they returned in the afternoon and Mr. Couldrey took us for an hour through the mine. We went one mile in on the three hundred foot level, first walking and then on a diminutive trolley. The blues and yellows in the tunnel were very pretty. We passed occasional groups of Indians with acetylene cap lamps, and at the end saw them at work with a steam drill getting out the ore, which averages 7 1/2%, and runs as high as 15%, copper, very much when one reflects that in Utah they are working ore at

1.8%. In places it was very hot, due to a spontaneous combustion fire going on nearby. Seeing the infinite calculation, the miles of tunneling and bracing and scaffolding with wood, the two or three kinds of pipe, the light and trolley wires, the drilling, digging, hauling, the transportation to the smelter, the coal mining, the bringing of the lime, which to be sure is only six miles from the smelter, the treatment of "fines" to adapt the ore to the blast process, the gigantic cauldrons to boil and skim the molten ore, the purifying processes with other minerals in other cauldrons, the hauling of the bars to the sea and their transportation by water, to be again refined at home to pure copper,- all this makes one realize at last what a piece of copper means.

After the mine we went through the machine and carpentry shops, where Peruvians were working under Gringo bosses. Then Mr. Stone, with a four-mule Studebaker wagon, took us to see the town. The town of Cerro de Pasco is nearer four than three centuries old. It has abominable pavements with drainage troughs down the middle, and no water supply but that brought on the backs of Indians from the lake several miles away. Many of the buildings are good, of Spanish architecture, recalling Quito, except that all the better buildings had rather decorative balconies on the upper story, more of the ground floor rooms are paved, and the interiors are much cleaner. There are a plaza, a market place, and a long narrow church filled with hideous images. The dirt of a mining town, the bleak climate and the hard life of the inhabitants, give the place a cheerless feeling that chills the heart. The shops seemed good, and we were amazed to find fresh Eastman films. There are a good many middle class Peruvians mingled with the ragged Indians. We went to a photographer, where Lucy noticed numbers painted on the background for taking photographs. To her inquiry, the photographer answered that his patients looked so much alike he made them stand under the numbers so that he could tell them which was which when he turned out a group. The market was rather creditable and clean. The

garrison of 100 soldiers has lately been increased to 150, due to revolutionary possibilities. Mr. Durand, it seems, is from the Huanuco country northeast of here.

We dined with the Couldreys. Mrs. Couldrey is a very pretty woman from Connecticut, and has as governess a very attractive Miss Thayer from Norwich, Connecticut. Their house was cheerful but intolerably hot, and their hospitality was very pleasant. Especially was it pleasant to find these two women not only uncomplaining, but positively seeming to delight in their life in this cheerless spot. It seems they ride horseback, have frequent dances, bowling competitions, etc. On the way back to the car we looked in at the Club. The rooms are delightful and in good taste, with bowling alleys, billiards, a ball room and a reading room, where gringoes sat in easy chairs before a big fireplace reading newspapers from home.

Mr. Couldrey told me of the straightforwardness and skill of the Company's lawyer, a Mr. Gumez, I think. It seems an Indian got his foot hurt and according to practice was given medical attendance and support pending recovery. The Company's doctor found the man to be prolonging his illness fraudulently and to have employed a Peruvian lawyer. The Indian waited until a few days after the one yearlimit before deciding to sue the Company. His accommodating lawyer antedated the suit. The accident having been trifling, the Company failed to have an official delegate examine the Indian in pursuance of law. The Company's lawyer, however, had drawn up and officially signed, sealed and delivered, a proces setting forth a mythical examination and dated a day or two after the accident. This is regarded not as dishonest by the Company's lawyer, but as a knowing skill in using Peruvian weapons against Peruvians.

On another occasion a suit had to go before one of three local judges, of whom one was crazy, one had delirium tremens, and a third was the brother of the lawyer representing the Company's adversary. After full deliberation the Company's lawyer proposed that the sane but biased judge be selected and that at the last moment appeal be taken on the ground that the

Company had just learned that a brother of the judge represented their adversary.